

The role of drivers and values of sports luxury brands on the reactions of buyers' behaviors according to different levels of brand equity

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Abstract: The aim of this research is to examine the impact of drivers and values associated with luxury sports brands on consumer behavior, considering different levels of brand equity. The study adopts a correlational design with practical implications. The target population includes all customers of luxury sports brands in Mazandaran province. Based on the Krejcie and Morgan table, a statistical sample size of 384 was determined for a large population. To achieve this sample size, 420 questionnaires were distributed, and 392 valid responses were analyzed. Data collection was conducted using a quantitative approach through the administration of four researcher-developed questionnaires, which assessed stimuli, luxury brand values, consumer behavioral reactions, and brand equity. The validity of the questionnaires was established via factor analysis, while reliability was confirmed using Cronbach's alpha. The data were analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistics. Descriptive statistics were employed to characterize the statistical population, examine the frequency and distribution of data, define variables, and generate related charts and tables. Hypothesis testing, model construction, and other necessary analyses were performed using LISREL for factor analysis and SPSS for inferential statistics, alongside model fitting software. The findings reveal that the values associated with luxury sports brands significantly influence consumer behavior, contingent on varying levels of brand equity. It is recommended that managers of organizations and companies involved in producing both sports and non-sports brands focus on enhancing brand equity by offering high-quality luxury products that create positive experiences and appeal for consumers.

Keywords: drivers, luxury brands, buyers' behaviors, brand equity.

1. Introduction

The brand is a central element in profit generation and serves as the foundation of the modern economy (Tarighi et al., 2021). In club management, the primary goal is to cultivate brand relationships, enhance fan loyalty, and manage fan behavior to establish an emotional connection between the club brand and its supporters, thereby achieving a competitive advantage (Tarighi, Ahmadi, & Salehi, 2022). In today's competitive market, securing a favorable position in the minds of consumers is crucial for fostering brand loyalty. One of the key factors in achieving this position is the brand equity of the company. Brand equity refers to the additional value or utility that a brand, such as Nike, brings to a product (Kazemiha, 2017).

Having local roots significantly enhances the value of a luxury brand. A luxury brand cannot be built without a historical foundation. These stories, which are not merely advertising tools, are invaluable assets to any brand. If a brand lacks a story, one must be created. However, the past and history alone are insufficient; it is essential to create a legend—a narrative that turns dreams into reality. This distinction is what sets luxury brands apart from premium brands. This is a strategy often employed by newer American or Italian brands, as such stories help establish a meaningful connection between the product and the customer (Gudi et al., 2016).

Sports marketing, therefore, involves the specialized application of marketing principles and processes to both sports and non-sports products through financial support within the sports industry (Tarighi, Talebi, & Salehi, 2022). Having a history does not imply being anchored in the past; rather, it signifies possessing a valuable legacy and ensuring continuity (Al-Qarabat et al., 2020). A brand's history does not necessarily need to be extensive, as real luxury brands will continue to emerge in the future (Jin, 2019). Another defining characteristic of luxury is maintaining the original location of production and remaining true to the brand's roots. A product that changes its production location is no longer considered a luxury (Alexander & Serchia, 2018).

Luxury goods transcend mere quality; they represent the distinction between "very good" and "extraordinary." In the realm of luxury, the key

differentiator is the emotional experience that these goods evoke. However, it is ultimately society that defines what constitutes luxury (Dhaliwal et al., 2020). While academic research in Iran highlights customer loyalty as the most significant trait of Iranian consumers across various products and services (Nafee et al., 2019), there has been a lack of focus on areas such as brand management and concepts like brand equity and added brand value. This oversight has resulted in a missed opportunity for domestic marketers to capitalize on these critical aspects (Sayad & Jalali, 2018).

To date, only a few studies have explored the subliminal effects of brand names or specific categories on consumer behavior. Growing evidence suggests that the influence of stimuli becomes apparent when consumer judgments are shaped by recently activated information (Zarei, 2019). Enhancing the accessibility of evaluative perceptions and inferences regarding products can significantly impact the assessment of similar goods (Otero & Wilson, 2018). Additionally, research indicates that consumer judgments can be influenced not only by the activation of specific knowledge content but also by altering the way information is processed in the minds of the audience (Beker et al., 2018).

In addition to assessing brand equity, it is crucial to understand how brand equity influences buyers' attitudes and behaviors. Ultimately, the success of a brand's value in the marketplace is determined by the actions and reactions of its consumers, making the understanding of buyer behavior and cognition vital in today's business environment (Sharda & Bhatt, 2019). The key product features that influence consumer decision-making are central to the marketing strategies of any organization (Pool et al., 2019).

Despite its importance, the relationship between brand equity and buyer behavior has been explored in relatively few studies. Generally, brand equity enhances value for the customer, helps establish and maintain defensible competitive positions, increases consumer receptivity to advertisements and promotions, and facilitates quicker market penetration (Morad et al., 2020).



Sports fans engage in various behaviors to support their favorite sports clubs. Commercial brands that officially sponsor these clubs are keen on attracting and fostering relationships with these fans (Tarighi, Kerami, & Salehi, 2022). Every brand has its own distinct personality, and those that clearly define and communicate their identity and goals while presenting a relatable and friendly image are better positioned to establish meaningful and mutually beneficial relationships with their customers (Sajadi et al., 2016).

In today's world, professional sports have evolved into a significant business sector, prompting sports managers to increasingly adopt marketing strategies and concepts related to customer demand (Sajadi et al., 2016). A sports team can be viewed as an organizational brand, with its personality and identity deeply ingrained in the minds of its fans. This institutionalized identity significantly influences fans' behavioral and attitudinal responses towards their favorite team (Tarighi, Sheikh, & Salehi, 2022).

Like non-sports organizations, sports organizations are subject to environmental and global changes and face their own unique challenges (Sajadi et al., 2014). A major issue confronting marketing managers today is the lack of effective planning in their efforts to create and sustain a brand. This challenge often arises from insufficient understanding of brand characteristics and a lack of knowledge about proper brand management techniques, which are essential for effectively linking a product with its brand name.

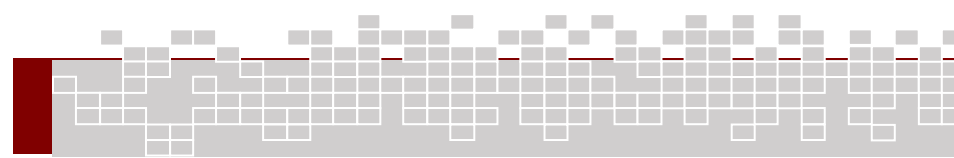
Many marketing and brand managers are well-versed in marketing concepts such as understanding customer needs, positioning, and promotional activities, and they often have substantial experience in implementing these strategies. However, a common challenge they face is the inability to leverage these marketing concepts to enhance brand value. This issue largely stems from a limited understanding of the brand name as a crucial intangible asset. Many managers tend to perceive assets only as tangible items—those that can be seen and touched—rather than recognizing the significant value of the brand as an intangible asset (Bashirpour & Mohammadian, 2017).

An analysis of the performance of several international sports organizations, including global sports federations and national organizations from various countries, reveals that they have successfully employed diverse sports marketing techniques to achieve their objectives. These organizations have managed to achieve substantial success across different marketing domains by effectively utilizing these strategies (Tarighi, Hamidi, & Rajabi, 2017).

Brands in the sports industry should be built on concepts that resonate meaningfully with members of the target market (Malki, Hosseini, & Tarighi, 2020). Brand value manifests in various ways, including increased customer loyalty, positive perceptions, the ability to attract new customers and command higher prices, ease of entry into new markets, and the prevention of new competitors entering the market (Tarighi & Sajjadi, 2021). The growing emphasis on managerial efficiency, aesthetic appeal, and the ideological aspects of branding has compelled marketing researchers to continuously revise and reassess the theory and conceptual complexity of this multifaceted structure (Tarighi et al., 2022).

Strong and successful brands possess two essential human-like characteristics: heart and intellect. These brands are capable of influencing both the emotional and rational aspects of consumers' minds (Sajadi et al., 2014). One of the key advantages of brand equity is the potential to extend the brand into other product categories. Brand extension, in general, is defined as the use of an existing brand name to enter a new product category (Becker et al., 2018).

Tran et al. (2020) conducted a study exploring the relationship between brand authenticity, brand equity, and customer satisfaction, involving a total of 263 participants. The results indicated two key findings: (1) brand authenticity is positively associated with brand equity, and (2) brand authenticity significantly affects customer satisfaction. These findings suggest that marketers can leverage brand authenticity to assess, plan, and monitor their brands' perceived authenticity among customers. Similarly, Zhang et al. (2019) examined the implicit motivations driving consumers to purchase luxury brands. Their results suggest that consumers' implicit social motives for buying luxury



brands stem from the fulfillment of at least one social goal, and dissatisfaction with one social goal increases their expectation of satisfaction through another. Additionally, Wang and Fusiri (2018) investigated factors influencing consumer behavior in purchasing luxury goods in China, revealing that brand equity may significantly impact Chinese consumers' behavior regarding luxury goods.

Building on these insights, this research aims to examine the relationship between stimuli and the values of sports luxury brands on buyer behavior, considering different levels of brand equity. The central research question is whether there is a relationship between the role of stimuli and the values of sports luxury brands and buyer behavior across varying levels of brand equity.

2. Materials and Methods

Statistical Population

The research targeted all customers of luxury sports brands in Mazandaran Province. This defined the statistical population for the study.

Sampling Method

The study employed a correlational research design. According to the table of Georges and Morgan, the required sample size for the large population was determined to be 384. To achieve this sample size, 420 questionnaires were distributed. Out of these, 392 completed questionnaires were collected and analyzed.

Data Collection Method

Data were collected quantitatively using a structured questionnaire. Four researcher-developed questionnaires were utilized, focusing on:

1. Stimuli Questionnaire: Assesses the drivers or stimuli associated with luxury sports brands.
2. Luxury Brand Values Questionnaire: Evaluates the perceived values of luxury brands.
3. Buyer Behavior Reactions Questionnaire: Measures the reactions of buyers to luxury sports brands.

4. Brand Equity Questionnaire: Investigates the specific value of the brand.

Data Analysis Method

The validity of the questionnaires was confirmed through factor analysis, while reliability was assessed using Cronbach's alpha coefficient. Descriptive and inferential statistics were applied to analyze the collected data.

- Descriptive Statistics: Used to examine the characteristics of the statistical population, including frequency and data distribution. This analysis also involved defining variables and creating relevant graphs and tables.
- Inferential Statistics: Employed for hypothesis testing, model drawing, and other necessary statistical tests. LISREL software was used for factor analysis, and SPSS software was utilized for additional inferential statistical analysis, including model drawing and fitting.

This comprehensive methodology ensures robust analysis and provides insights into the role of drivers and values of sports luxury brands on buyer behavior based on different levels of brand equity.

3. Results

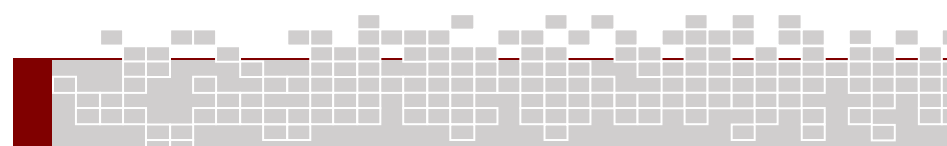
In the descriptive analysis, the results indicated that out of the respondents, 220 were women and 172 were men, with women making up the majority at over 56%. Regarding marital status, 239 respondents were married, and 153 were single, with married individuals representing more than 61% of the sample. Age-wise, the highest frequency was observed among individuals over 30 years old, accounting for 259 participants, or 66% of the sample. In terms of education, the majority of respondents had a bachelor's degree or lower, comprising 253 individuals or 64.7% of the sample. The lowest frequency was among those with a doctorate degree, with only 8 respondents, representing 0.2% of the sample.

Table 1. Number and percentage of age, gender, educational qualification

	Description	number	Abundance percentage
gender	woman	220	56%
	the man	172	44%
marriage	married	239	61%
	single	153	39%
age	under 30 years	133	34%
	Above 30 years	259	66%
Degree	Bachelor and below	253	64.7%
	Master's degree	131	33.3%
	Ph.D	8	2%

Table 2: path coefficients and test statistic – variables

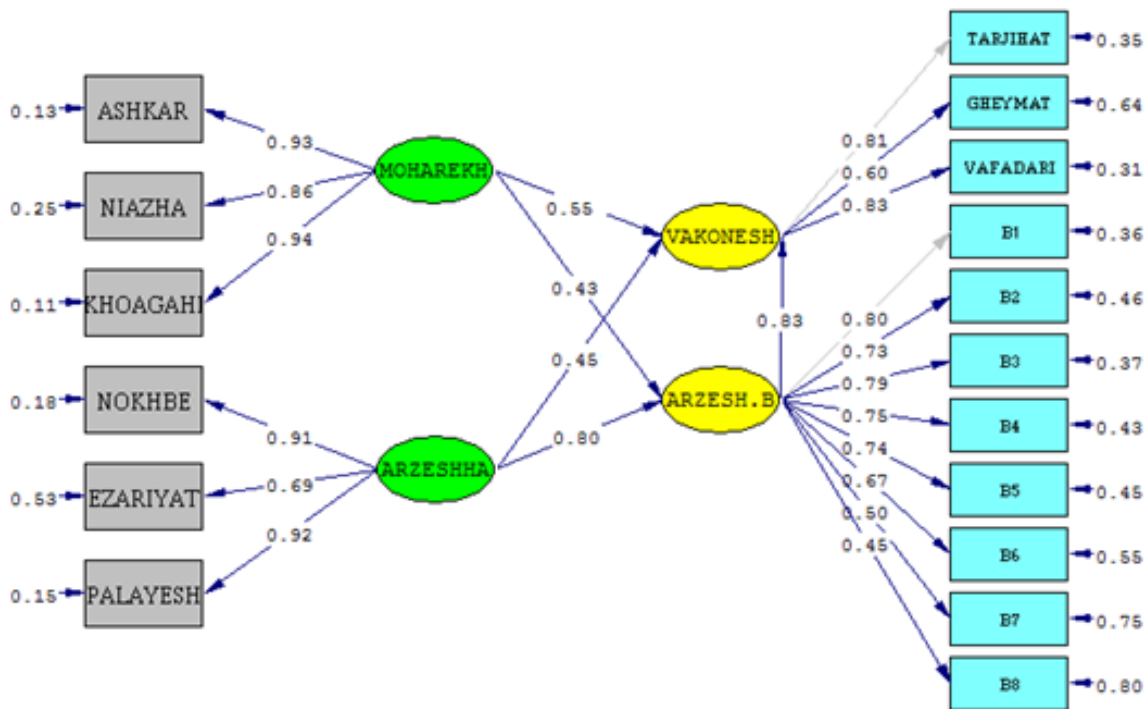
the route	path factor	t-statistics	Standard Error	result
Stimulants → behavioral reaction of buyers	0.55	3.45	0.076	confirm
Stimulators → brand equity	0.43	2.23	0.058	confirm
Special value of the brand → behavioral reaction of buyers	0.83	5.22	0.082	confirm
Values → Behavioral reaction of buyers	0.45	2.34	0.064	confirm
Values → special value of the brand	0.80	5.15	0.079	confirm
Disclosure and consumption status → preferences and priority	0.36	2.91	0.052	confirm
Revealed and usage status → special price	0.40	3.14	0.061	confirm
Obvious and consumption situation → loyalty	0.08	0.06	0.148	reject
Revealing and consumption situation → special value of the brand	0.43	3.81	0.059	confirm
Special value of the brand → preferences and priority	0.40	2.82	0.063	confirm
Special brand value → special price	0.60	4.86	0.075	confirm
Special brand value → loyalty	0.48	3.19	0.069	confirm
Unique needs → preferences and priorities	0.11	-1.11	0.173	reject
Unique needs → special price	0.33	2.01	0.049	confirm
Unique needs → Loyalty	0.32	2.22	0.048	confirm
Unique needs → special value of the brand	0.35	3.04	0.050	confirm
General self-awareness → preferences and priorities	0.05	0.31	0.137	reject
General awareness → special price	0.37	3.13	0.053	confirm
General self-awareness → Loyalty	0.10	0.60	0.170	reject
Public awareness → special value of the brand	0.39	3.74	0.057	confirm
Elitism → preferences and priority	0.57	3.92	0.073	confirm
Elitism → special price	0.44	4.10	0.065	confirm
Elitism → Loyalty	0.11	0.65	0.172	reject
Elitism → special value of the brand	0.42	4.13	0.071	confirm
Membership → preferences and priority	0.18	1.60	0.185	reject
Membership → special price	0.55	6.38	0.077	confirm



Membership → Loyalty	0.40	3.42	0.062	confirm
Membership → special value of the brand	0.38	2.50	0.054	confirm
Refine → preferences and priority	0.46	4.23	0.068	confirm
Refinement → special price	0.12	0.22	0.180	reject
Refinement → Loyalty	0.40	3.18	0.070	confirm
Refinement → special value of the brand	0.39	3.14	0.056	confirm

Table 3: Cronbach's alpha scales for measuring the reliability of questionnaires

Cronbach's alpha scales for measuring the reliability of questionnaires	Alpha coefficient
Revealed and consumption situation	0.711
Unique needs of customers	0.723
Public awareness	0.769
elitism	0.714
your membership	0.753
refinement	0.808
Preferences and priorities	0.764
Special price	0.811
Loyalty	0.733
stimuli	0.867
values	0.873
Behavioral reactions	0.849
Brand equity	0.888



Chi-Square=705.23, df=293, P-value=0.00000, RMSEA=0.069

Chart 1. The results of confirming the final model of the main hypotheses of the research

4. Discussion and Conclusion

A researcher's efforts extend beyond merely analyzing the collected data. Their final responsibility is to communicate the research findings to the broader community, culminating in the preparation of a research report (Delawar, 2015). The primary objective of this research is to examine the role of drivers and values of luxury brands in influencing buyer behavior across different levels of brand equity. The findings indicate that all the hypotheses of the current study were confirmed.

Specifically, the results demonstrate that the drivers (or stimulators) of luxury brands significantly impact buyers' behavioral responses, depending on the varying levels of the luxury brand's specific value. Given the crucial role that brand names play in highlighting the relative and absolute advantages of products from the perspective of customers—and in generating financial and reputational value for companies—it is essential for companies to understand the key components of their brand names. This includes identifying relative and absolute advantages from the customer's viewpoint and offering solutions to recognize the role of quantitative and qualitative indicators in emphasizing these advantages. Consequently, research in this area is both necessary and important. The findings of this research align with those of previous studies conducted by Wang and Fusiri (2018), Sharma (2017), and Obaid and Khattak (2017).

The findings of this research reveal that the value of luxury brands significantly influences buyers' behavioral responses, depending on the specific levels of the brand's value. Branding within the publishing industry can enhance the performance of publishing institutions in a competitive environment by creating value through product or service offerings. This value addition or subtraction affects the company's overall worth and its customers. Brand equity is built on various assets, which can be categorized into four key groups: brand awareness and recognition, mental associations, perceived quality, and brand loyalty. These findings are consistent with previous research by Tran et al. (2020) and Dehdashti and Naeli (2019).

Furthermore, the research indicates that different levels of luxury brand equity significantly impact consumer preferences and priorities. This, in turn, affects consumer loyalty based on the specific value of the luxury brand. Managers can influence consumer perceptions of quality by adjusting prices; for instance, an increase in price can be perceived as indicative of higher product quality. However, price reduction strategies should be used cautiously and not as a long-term or frequent approach. These findings align with the results of studies by Kuma Ro Nayak (2019) and Nwanko et al. (2014).

The results of this research indicate that customers' unique needs, relative to different levels of luxury brand equity, significantly influence their preferences and priorities. Consequently, the consumption situation substantially affects customers' willingness to pay based on the brand's specific value. To address these unique needs, businesses should foster flexibility in their processes to develop and implement innovative product and service ideas that meet the audience's specific requirements. Conducting market research can help identify these unique needs, enabling companies to produce offerings that align well with the customers' expectations. These findings are consistent with previous research by Kuma Ro Nayak (2019) and Zhang et al. (2019).

Moreover, the research shows that customers' unique needs and brand awareness significantly impact their willingness to pay and their loyalty. Public awareness plays a crucial role in shaping preferences and priorities across different levels of luxury brand equity. Brand awareness—the probability of recognizing and recalling a brand and its associated products or services—is fundamental to promoting and developing a product. It is particularly important when launching new products or differentiating from competitors. The findings of this study align with those of Zhang et al. (2019), Shao et al. (2019), Park and Srinivasan (2014), and Tabatabaei Nasab, Nouri, & Ikhlas (2012).

The findings of this research indicate that elitism significantly influences preferences and priorities based on different levels of luxury brand value. Specifically, elitism impacts customers' willingness to pay a premium price and affects their loyalty in relation to varying levels of brand equity. In today's competitive market, brands have become a central

focus for organizations, and prioritizing factors that impact branding can be an effective strategy for advancing brand development and establishing a strong presence in the industry.

Customer loyalty, which serves as a deterrent against behavioral change, is often more pronounced among service customers than among those of tangible products. In the service sector, intangible attributes such as credibility and reliability play a crucial role in fostering and sustaining loyalty. These findings align with research conducted by Tabatabai Nasab, Nouri, & Ikhlas (2013) and Raheel Shams (2016).

The findings of this research reveal that membership significantly influences preferences and priorities based on different levels of luxury brand equity. Additionally, membership affects customers' willingness to pay a higher price and plays a crucial role in fostering loyalty relative to the brand's specific value. Quality is perceived as the value received for the price paid, and brands are essential to companies as they drive market share, enhance customer loyalty, strengthen distribution channels, offer higher profit margins, and protect against competitive threats. Consequently, brand-building activities are integral to various marketing efforts, from new product development to retail advertising. In an increasingly globalized market, "brands" often equate to "global brands." These findings align with research by Wang and Fusiri (2018), Sharma (2017), and Tabatabai Nasab, Nouri, & Ikhlas (2012).

The results also indicate that refinement significantly impacts preferences and priorities according to different levels of luxury brand value. Refinement affects customers' willingness to pay more and contributes significantly to loyalty based on the brand's specific value. Brand equity is closely tied to customer loyalty, which is a critical factor in determining a brand's value. A loyal customer is likely to pay a premium for a brand due to the unique value perceived in its products, distinguishing them from alternatives. Customer loyalty is a valuable asset that can drive consistent sales and profit. While competitors may replicate products or services, altering customer loyalty is more challenging. Loyalty may stem from habit or the perceived cost of switching brands. These findings are consistent with those of Zamani Moghadam and Jaafari Far (2013),

Park and Srinivasan (2014), and Hosni, Mousavi Bazargan, & Qadirinaya (2013).

Management should focus on enhancing brand trust among consumers, recognizing that it stems from both the brand's popularity and the perceived quality of the company's products and services. However, brand popularity is influenced not only by the brand's identity, personality, and characteristics but also by cultural factors, market conditions, and competitive dynamics. Brands should align their popularity strategies with customer perceptions and cultural and demographic factors to effectively target their audience.

Popularity extends beyond the initial product and service offerings; it is deeply rooted in integrated marketing communications. Trust in a brand is crucial and is often established through consistent and honest product claims supported by strategic investments in advertising and product support. To build and maintain brand trust, it is essential to identify and address the factors that contribute to the brand's popularity. Effective planning should include targeted advertising and product support, as well as leveraging consumer advocacy to enhance brand recognition and trust.

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نقش محرک ها و ارزش های برندهای لوکس ورزشی بر واکنش رفتارهای خریداران با توجه به سطوح مختلف ارزش ویژه برند

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چکیده: هدف این پژوهش بررسی نقش محرک‌ها و ارزش های برندهای لوکس بر واکنش رفتارهای خریداران با توجه به سطوح مختلف ارزش ویژه برند است. پژوهش حاضر از نوع همبستگی از نظر هدف کاربردی بود. جامعه آماری تحقیق را کلیه مشتریان برندهای لوکس ورزشی در استان مازندران تشکیل دادند. با توجه به جدول گرجسی و مورگان نمونه آماری برای جامعه بزرگ ۳۸۴ در نظر گرفته شد. برای رسیدن به این حجم نمونه در مجموع ۴۲۰ پرسشنامه پخش شده و ۳۹۲ پرسشنامه قابل تحلیل شد. داده‌های این تحقیق به صورت کمی و از طریق پرسشنامه جمع آوری شد. از چهار پرسشنامه محقق ساخته که شامل پرسشنامه محرک‌ها، ارزش های برندهای لوکس، واکنش رفتارهای خریداران، ارزش ویژه برند استفاده شد. روایی پرسشنامه از طریق تحلیل عاملی و پایایی بوسیله آلفای کرونباخ تأیید شد و روش تجزیه و تحلیل داده های جمع آوری شده از آمار توصیفی و استنباطی استفاده شده است. برای بررسی ویژگی‌های جامعه آماری از نظر فراوانی و توزیع داده‌ها و همچنین برای تعریف متغیرها و ترسیم نمودارها و جداول مربوط و غیره از آمار توصیفی و همچنین برای آزمون فرضیات، ترسیم مدل و دیگر آزمونهای مورد نیاز از آمار جهت تحلیل عاملی LISREL و از نرم افزارهای SPSS استنباطی به کمک نرم افزارهای تحلیل آماری و از نرم افزار جهت رسم مدل و برازش آن استفاده شده است. یافته ها نشان داد که ارزش های برند لوکس ورزشی با توجه به سطوح مختلف ارزش ویژه برند بر رفتار خریداران تأثیرگذار می باشد. پیشنهاد میشود که مدیریت سازمانها و شرکتهای تولید کننده برندهای ورزشی و غیر ورزشی، ضمن توجه به مقوله ارزش ویژه برند و تهیه برند های با کیفیت و لوکس موجبات کارهایی را که باعث ایجاد تجربه مثبت و مجذوبیت برای مصرف کنندگان میشود را فراهم نماید.

واژه‌های کلیدی: محرک ها، برندهای لوکس، رفتارهای خریداران، ارزش ویژه برند.

ارجاع: طریقی، ر. زمینی، ع. صالحی رستمی، م. (۱۴۰۲). نقش محرک ها و ارزش های برندهای لوکس ورزشی بر واکنش رفتارهای خریداران با توجه به سطوح مختلف ارزش ویژه برند. فصلنامه رویکرد انسانی در مطالعات ورزشی. (۲)۳: ۴۹۰-۵۰۰.

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این نماد به معنای مجوز استفاده از اثر با دو شرط است یکی استاد به نویسنده و دیگری استفاده برای مقاصد غیرتجاری.